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THE TRAINING OF BABIES

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(Concluded from page 591.)

TO TRAIN a child to the use of a nursery chair would hardly seem to come within the province of the trained nurse very often, except as the head nurse of a children's ward may labor with her little charges, but I think the obstetrical nurse may often start a baby on the right path, and may inspire the nurse-maid who is to succeed her to keep up the good work if she will only take a little trouble. Mothers of all classes seem to be rather careless in the early teaching of regular and cleanly habits. The little street children who are brought to our hospitals are often wearing diapers at the age of two and even three years, and in the homes of the well-to-do they seldom graduate from them before the age of a year and a half or later. The teaching should begin when a baby is six weeks old, if it is well and strong. Before that age it is better off to be left with as little handling as possible, and its back is too weak for experiments. At six weeks the baby is having only a few movements a day, and one can encourage it to have two regularly at the morning and evening toilet. When the baby is undressed the nurse leaves its shirt, band, and socks on, so that it may not grow cold, and holds it out over a chamber or basin. The attitude suggests what is expected, and the baby is almost sure to expel some gas and to have a small movement. Possibly it will urinate also. If this habit is kept up regularly and persistently, it will gradually learn to have its movements at those times rather than at others. In another week or two it can sit on a small agate-ware chamber, which should be held on the nurse's lap, so that the baby can lean back against her, its knees or feet in her hands. In all such trials the baby must be in a comfortable, unstrained position, or it will cry and no good result will follow.

To teach the baby to urinate in the chamber is not quite so easy, but it is possible if watchfulness and patience are used. Whenever the baby wakes from a nap or comes in from a ride it should immediately be held out, and when it is old enough to be awake much, it can be put on the chamber at regular intervals for trial. It is amazing how soon the baby grasps the idea and waits to be put on, usually making some little signal of warning, which the nurse must watch for and learn to interpret. Often a little, peculiar cry or grunt will announce that it wishes aid.

A Scotch nurse-maid, whom I had left in charge of one of my babies, and whom I had warned to watch for his signal, when he should have evolved one, came to me with great pride, later, to tell me she had discovered that he put both thumbs in his mouth and looked intently at his fingers when he was ready. Children love cleanliness when they are brought up to it, and early learn to wait for help a few moments rather than have the discomfort of a wet diaper. I have known babies who were completely trained at six and seven months, and who wore drawers at ten months or a year. Probably all normal children could have as good records, and how much pleasanter such habits are for all concerned—the baby, the nurse-maid, and all the baby's family. I have heard women groan over the memory of journeys taken with a young child, during which time their state-rooms were festooned with drying diapers, and great numbers had to be carried along to insure comfort. I was much pleased to hear of a journey taken this winter from Chicago to Los Angeles by a mother with two well-trained children. The elder baby, aged eighteen months, has been so long established in her good ways that no one gave her a thought, except when she asked to be taken to the toilet-room. The baby boy of four months was partly trained; his invaluable little chamber was taken along, and only an occasional wet diaper had to be rinsed and dried.

As a child grows older it is more difficult to train it if it has been neglected. I remember my despair in hospital days over children old enough to talk who had no idea of telling of their needs. Rewards and punishments were alike unavailing, they were so unused to self-control. I am sometimes in households where a child of a year or a little over is being taught. After it has learned to have its movement on its chair,—and that lesson usually comes first,—if it is slow about telling when it wishes to urinate, the lesson is sometimes learned more quickly if it is put directly into drawers. A few mishaps occur at first, but the wet drawers are so much more uncomfortable than a wet diaper that the poor baby soon tells for its own greater comfort.

It is often through the ignorance of its care-takers that a child's training is left until so late; its mother does not realize that earlier training is possible, and our duty in this line should include the enlightenment of the baby's guardians as well as care for the baby itself.

